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Stormont Castle
Belfast

20 February 1978

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, THE RT HON ROY MASON, MP,
IN THE COMMONS THIS AFTERNOON (20 FEBRUARY):-

At 9 pm last Friday evening, a bomb exploded at the La Mon House restaurant near Gransha in County Down. Some 500 people were in the building, most of them attending two social functions which had no political or sectarian connections whatsoever. The explosion immediately caused an intense fire which swept through the building and gutted it. Twelve people were killed, their bodies charred almost beyond recognition, and a further 23 people were injured, of whom 11 had to be detained in hospital.

Subsequent investigations showed that an explosive device, with cans of petrol attached to it, had been placed outside the building in an alcove opposite one of the windows of the smaller of the function rooms. The detonation therefore had the effect of hurling burning petrol straight into that room, where most of the casualties occurred.

No effective warning was given. PIRA have now admitted their guilt for this attack.

I am sure I speak for the whole House in expressing the utmost horror and disgust at this callous and senseless slaughter of innocent people, and in extending our heartfelt sympathy to their families and to those who were injured. By its very nature this murderous attack was likely to cause extensive casualties, and those who planned it and carried it out cannot now pretend that they could not foresee the carnage that it would cause. They have been rightly condemned from every quarter.

The Chief Constable and the GOC assured me on Saturday morning that the maximum available resources of the security forces were involved in urgent and intensive efforts to track down those responsible for this terrible crime. I am satisfied that there will be no relaxation of this effort.

I shall be having a further discussion with the Chief Constable and the GOC later today. We are unanimous in pursuing a clear policy of dealing with violence by the enforcement of the rule of law by the police supported by the army. It is fundamental to the maintenance of the rule of law that the whole community should unite behind the security forces. As a consequence of our policy, very real progress has been made in curtailing violence in Northern Ireland. I have made it clear, however, in this House and elsewhere that the Provisional IRA retain the capacity to perpetrate outrages of this kind. They want to stimulate a violent reaction, I have no intention of playing into their hands. I realise the deep emotions which have been aroused but what is needed is restraint plus the maximum support for the security forces from the whole community.

All responsible political leaders involved in the affairs of the Province have a major interest and a real part to play in facing our common problem of security. I propose to carry further my efforts to involve them in our common cause to eradicate violence and will be seeking talks with them in the near future.

The House will also have heard, with regret, of the death in a helicopter crash of the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Greenjackets. It is not yet possible to say what caused the crash.